



THE TANA RIVER

## RHINOCEROS-SHOOTING ON THE EQUATOR

BY MRS. S. L. HINDE

IT is almost invariably the keenest desire of sportsmen to hunt and shoot dangerous animals, not because they are more difficult to kill, but because anything short of straight shooting lays the odds on brute strength and cunning against human wits. Curiously enough, certain of the antelopes become dangerous when wounded—bush-buck frequently charge, and charge home—and among all “harmless” animals there have been individual cases where the hunted becomes the hunter, and from the unexpectedness of the attack turns the tables upon him. All African natives are greatly afraid of zebra, and believe the bite to be fatal. If a zebra is down, and almost at his last gasp, a native will only approach him with the greatest caution; and though zebra meat is a coveted delicacy (no true Mahomedan may eat meat unless it has been orthodoxly killed, *i.e.* the throat must be cut whilst the animal is living) he will rather see the zebra die, and forego his feast, than run the remotest risk of a

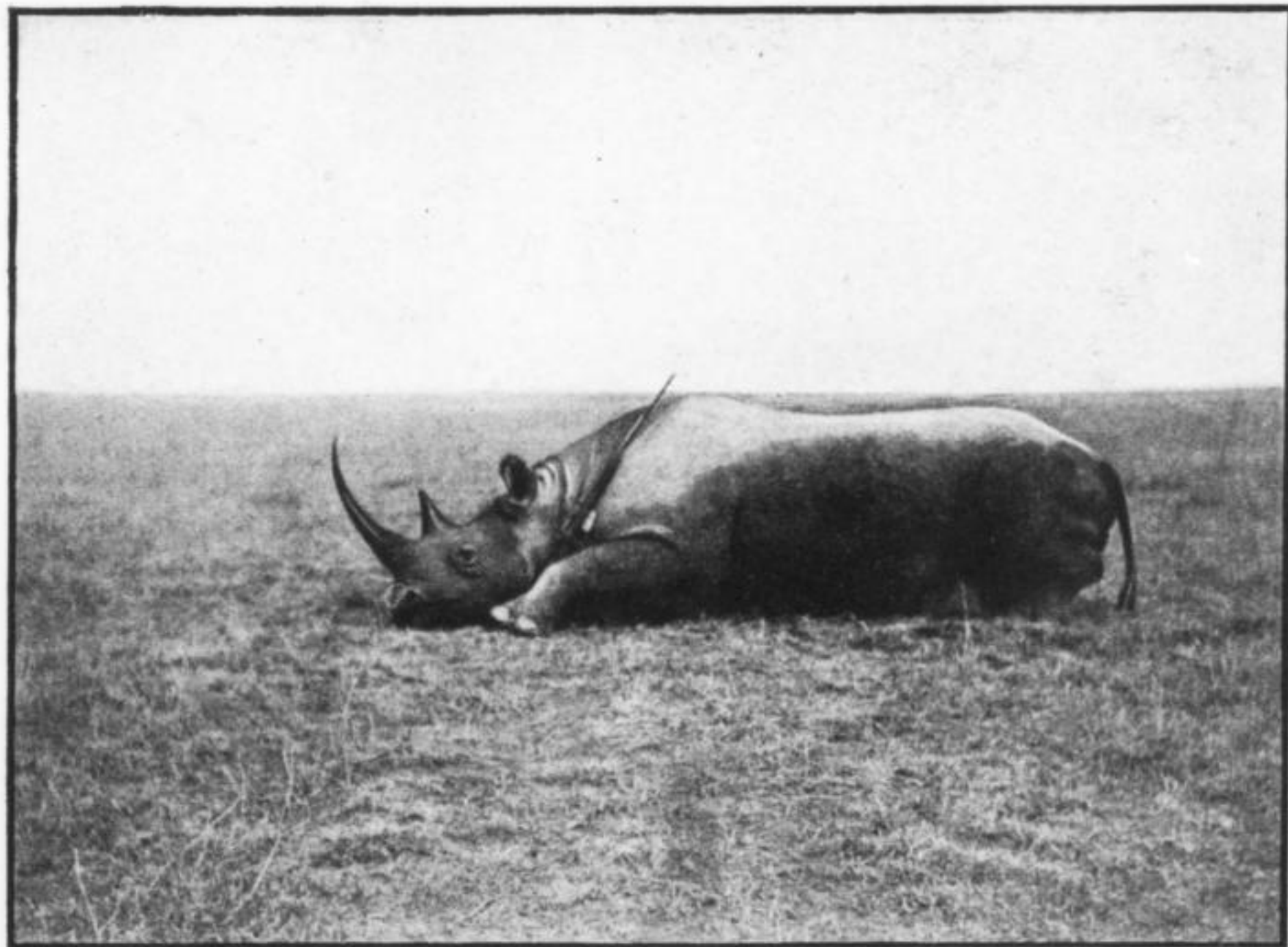
bite. This is the greatest mortification of the flesh, and could only be caused by genuine fear, as the native lives more for his meals than the veriest gourmand.

The number of women in the wild parts of Africa is fortunately not great, and the few who are there are compelled, if they wish to be anything but a burden to themselves and others, very materially to alter their previous methods of living. It is impossible for them to continue the kind of life they have been accustomed to, and only those who can readjust their ideas and habits have any chance of comfort. If a woman is able to take to sport (hunting and collecting), she keeps herself sound and interested. In an uncivilised land it is essential to have an occupation of this sort, for it means exercise, fresh air, employment, and skill, and the taste expands with the practice. To make a really good shot after a careful stalk, and see your beast fall dead without ever knowing he has been hit; to hunt a beast who knows you are after him, and to outwit and kill him in spite of his cunning—these are a sportsman's delights, and surely they are natural and wholesome.

In June 1903 I took out a game licence with the object of shooting a rhinoceros, though it was not until the following March that I succeeded in doing so. Sportsmen are not agreed on the subject of the dangerous character of rhino—some maintain that they are merely stupid; but if a deficient animal charges and digs his horn through an individual, or even only kneels on one, it is just as painful and disastrous as if he were quite intelligent. Rhino, even in places where they have not been hunted, will attack people who are walking along quietly, and the persistence with which they hunt and charge certainly looks as if they meant to do damage.

In a map recently made of parts of British East Africa, certain areas were specially marked "dangerous" entirely on account of the rhino inhabiting them; but whether their habits are the result of stupidity or of malice prepense is still a vexed question. In either case I was exceedingly anxious to shoot one. Their appearance is really against them, and, above all, they are difficult to kill. It seemed at first as if I should never even get a shot. In places where we had habitually seen them, they had either vanished or we sighted them in the distance and they made off before we could catch them up. On one occasion we pitched our camp near what we believed to be rhino ground. The place in which we expected to find them was a flat expanse, running along by a fairly large river, and dotted with a few trees. We rode for an hour and a half but saw nothing, and were at last reluctantly obliged to turn. Coming back, my husband put some of the men into the long grass on the edge of the river, thinking I might in this way get a shot at antelope,

as so late in the day it was certain a number of beasts would be sleeping in the reeds, and the men walking along would drive them out. Suddenly the front man, walking parallel with us, and just distinguishable in the grass, halted, and as he did so we saw, not five yards away, the horns of two rhino. It was useless to fire at horns, or even at the place where we knew the bodies belonging to them must be, as even a blade of grass will turn a small-bore bullet. We therefore tried to drive the beasts into the open. They were, however, much too cunning, and after showing themselves for a moment at the edge of the reeds they broke back, and we could see from our ponies that they were trotting along in the direction we had come



RHINOCEROS SHOT BY THE AUTHOR

from. As they did not reappear at the end of the patch of grass, we supposed they thought themselves safe and were lying down again in cover. My sais, who had climbed into a tree to command a larger range, began gesticulating violently, so I hoisted myself up beside him, and he pointed out the horns of the two beasts again appearing above the grass, this time at a distance of about ninety yards. From higher ground it was just worth taking a shot at them, though from a branch about six inches wide, which swayed up and down in a most discomposing manner, the rhino were in distinctly less danger than I was. In spite of these difficulties the shot must have been fairly accurate, as the rhino, with snorts and stamps, hurriedly departed;

but though we gave chase and found their trail we could not get up with them.

The second chance occurred when we were travelling over certain parts of the country we had not previously journeyed in. We had pitched our camp on the Tana river, a particularly beautiful spot, though at this and in many other places the river's beauty is essentially un-African. It is very wide, with a slow, strong current, and huge trees with luxuriant undergrowth fringe its banks and hang into and over the water. These reaches of the river are singularly peaceful-looking, and but for the treacherous snags which



CARAVAN CROSSING THE THIKA RIVER

dot the water, and the chattering of the monkeys in the boughs, one might almost imagine oneself beside the Thames. Our lunch table was laid under the trees at the edge of the river, and it seemed curiously at variance with the loveliness of the surroundings that we were obliged to tie up the dogs in case a crocodile should snap one of them up. The Tana swarms with crocodiles, and to see two or three dozen of these brutes of all sizes lying on a sand-spit is a common sight. They lie absolutely immovable, looking like logs washed up by the tide; but the slightest rustle will startle them into

activity, and they silently sink into the water and out of sight, only an occasional ripple on the smooth surface of the river betraying their watchful presence. All human creatures, of whatever race, combine in their loathing of crocodiles, and it is almost a matter of etiquette to fire at one on sight.

Crocodiles formed the topic of conversation, and my husband was saying how in the Congo they were frequently shot in trees. The rest of the party received this statement with a distinct show of incredulity, when one of the boys called out, "A crocodile, a crocodile!" And there, a visible illustration of the habit, was one lying on the branch of a tree projecting over the water on the



THE AUTHOR AND HER FIRST CROCODILE

opposite bank of the river. My Mannlicher was in my hand before the boy had finished speaking, and sitting on the edge of the bank I fired. Crocodiles are easy enough to hit and to kill, but they are very difficult to bag, as wherever they are hit they seem able to wriggle, and they wriggle themselves into deep water and are carried away by the current. I was, however, successful with mine—he opened his mouth very wide and shut it with a snap several times, and then wriggled off the tree, fortunately towards the bank and into a shallow. The men crossed the river at a ford a few hundred

yards lower down, and dragged my victim back with them. He was stone dead when they found him; but even so, and though they knew this, they could hardly be induced to touch the brute. Though I had previously hit many crocodiles, this was the first one I had bagged.

We were actually on our way back, and only two days from the station, when the long-deferred opportunity came. It was a very hot day, and the men who had been sent out early in the morning to look for rhino had probably merely gone out of sight of the camp and lain down under the nearest tree until they thought it was time to return, when they announced there were no rhino for miles in any direction. I was so disappointed that at two o'clock my husband suggested we should ride out and look for ourselves. As we wanted meat, I dismounted to shoot a hartebeeste, of which ugly animals there was a large herd a few hundred yards off. I took my Mannlicher and began walking slowly towards the herd; my husband, the ponies, and the men walking in the other direction. I was about two hundred yards from the herd, and was just going to sit down and fire, when I saw a rhino standing about three hundred yards off and just on the other side of the hartebeeste. I sat down and unloaded my Mannlicher, reloading it with solid bullets. My husband, seeing that something was happening, came towards me, but as he did so the rhino galloped off. I jumped on my pony and we gave chase as hard as we could. The hartebeeste fled in all directions, and in a dip in the ground we lost sight of the rhino.

A moment later we saw he had just crossed a nullah and was trotting slowly up the other side. This was excellent. We made for the nullah, reaching it just as our quarry arrived on the skyline, about a hundred yards off. I tumbled off my pony and was almost pulling the trigger, when a flock of rhino-birds accompanying the beast flew up off his back and gave the alarm; he did not hesitate a second, but made off again as hard as he could go, and as long as we could see him he was still moving. After so much bad luck this seemed almost like an interdict of Fate, and as it was getting late we were obliged to start back for camp. We were just remounting when my sais pointed excitedly up the nullah and said, "Another rhino." There, sure enough, was another, standing about three hundred yards off, and brilliantly red, after a mud bath he had evidently—as could be seen from the way the earth had been laid bare—just been taking. The nullah was sparsely dotted with trees and shrubs, and we crept along under cover of these till we were within about forty yards of our unsuspecting quarry, who continued to stand quite still, greatly enjoying the sunbath with

which he was concluding his toilet arrangements. I sat down on an ant-hill and fired before my husband or the other guns had covered the beast, and he fell right over with all his legs in the air. As rhino are often knocked down without being killed, and if one approaches them they get up and charge, I was not allowed to cross the nullah. Though we were pretty certain that this one was dead,



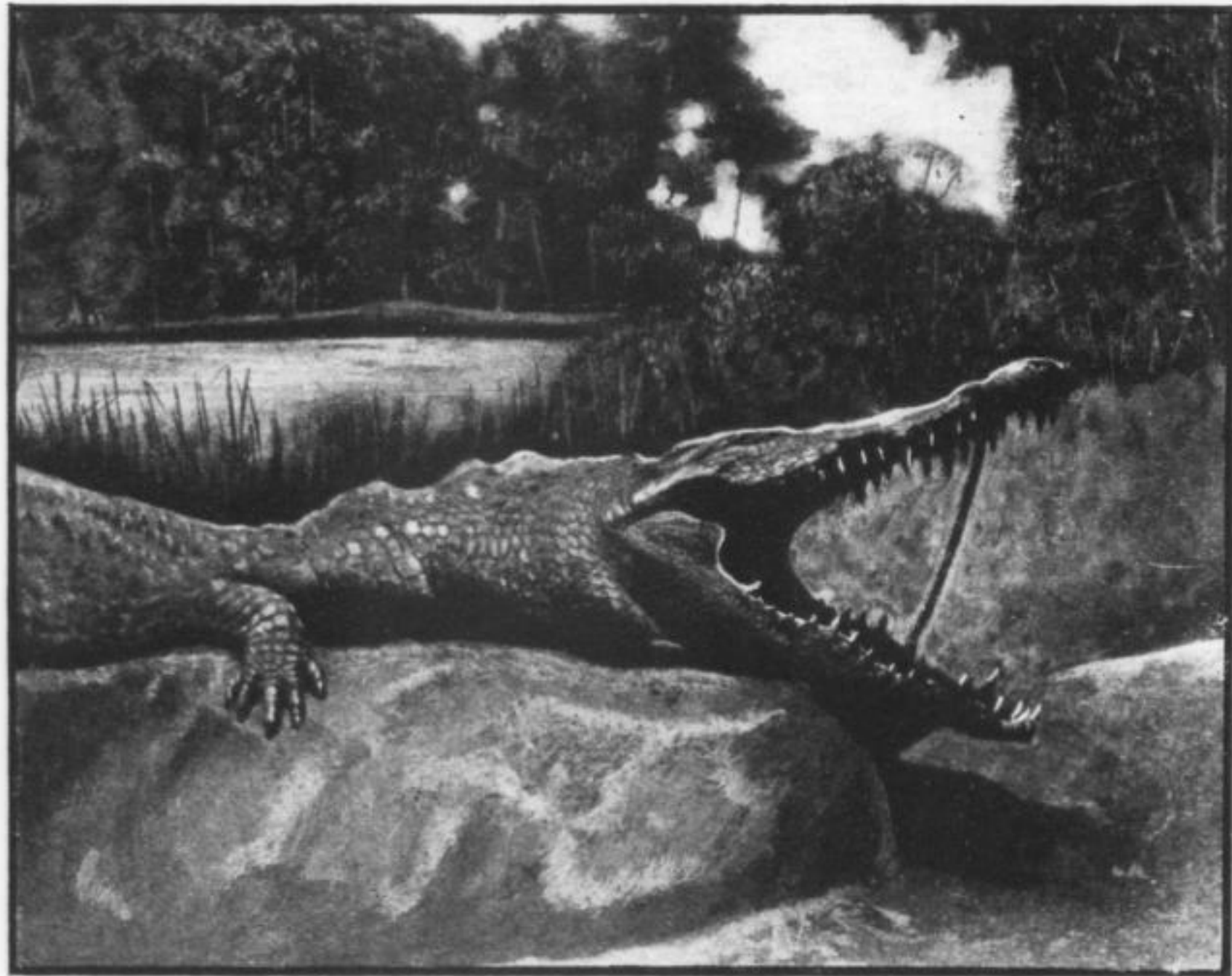
A CATCH IN THE TANA RIVER

one of the party crossed over to make sure, while my husband covered the animal from our side of the bank. This was, as it happened, an unnecessary precaution, as he was stone dead, the bullet having entered far back and having gone right through him, tearing every vital part as it went. On approaching the beast our friend called sharply to his man, who was too far ahead of him. As he called two more rhino got up out of the small stream where they

had evidently been lying, not five yards from my bag, and trotted up the bank. We did not see them for a moment, and I had then to take my rifle from my gun-bearer, so had not time to fire before they were over the rise and gone, removing the opportunity of the rather unusual bag of a right and left in rhinos.

The rhino-tail soup and rhino brains we had for dinner that night were, we all agreed, the best we had ever eaten.

Perhaps the size of Africa is its most continuously amazing feature: everything in and of the country is on an abnormally large scale. Extra large animals are shot on extra large plains; the rivers are extra large, and so are the fish in them. The accompanying photograph of an extra large fish speaks for itself. It would be laying oneself open to the charge of a proportionate disregard for truth to mention its weight, and I will only add that it was caught in the Tana river by a nigger policeman, with a bent pin and a piece of string—the bait was a worm.





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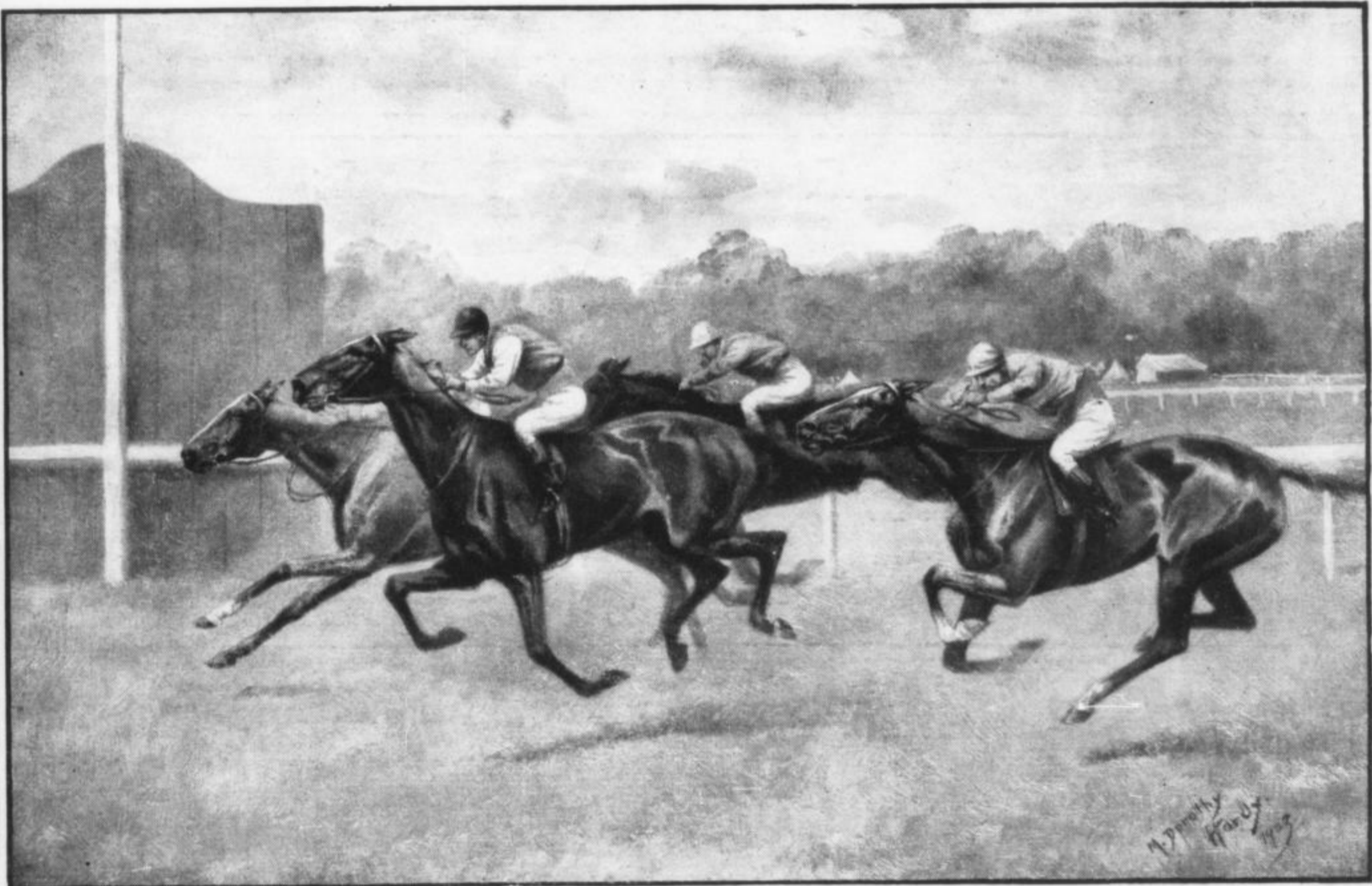
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